

documented the fact in a number of photographs. The purpose, however, is purely hygienic. an unpainted body is, in their opinion, exposed to certain illness. They explained this belief to me by saying that without paint the body becomes "hot". The men who travelled with me far from women were anxious every day to spread clay on face, chest and limbs, just to avoid "heat" or, in other words, fever. I thought of malaria, but they do not suffer from it. Of this I will speak later on.

Rough clay is applied daily, on infant bodies as well as on adults, for health purposes. It is used to cure all kinds of sickness, together with ochre, turtle fat and honey. Honey spread on wounds appears to hasten healing. Identical curative methods are employed in Oceania. They probably existed among the Tasmanians, and are still used in Australia by the aborigines. I found nothing of the kind in Africa, where honey is plentiful. The Onge consider clay, ochre, honey and turtle fat good for external and internal treatment alike—both preventive and curative. Powdered bees' wax of a dark colour is often added. I saw mothers give their children, as a laxative, a number of pills made of similar ingredients. No bigger than common hazelnuts, the pills are red and greasy. In Onge forests I saw some small excavations, a few feet deep, made to extract the medicinal clay from special ground pockets. In its natural form the clay is light coloured, powdery and free of stones. When it is burnt the colour changes, assuming red, yellow, whitish or black shades according to the different qualities used, all believed to possess healing properties and to ensure hygienic colouring of the body. Mixed as described above, clay is used by the Onge in every circumstance from fever to snake or scorpion bite, constipation, breast infection in women, or post-delivery bleeding.

Belief in the medicinal properties of clay is as old as humanity itself. Even among contemporary European peoples, notwithstanding severe criticism, clay is still honoured as health-giving, not, I must say, on wholly foolish grounds. The Onge, who smear their bodies constantly with clay, have the softest, most velvety skin that I ever saw anywhere in the world. Wounds spread with clay mixed with honey and fat leave negligible scars. The laxative and germ-killing action of clay is admitted by physicians in many countries, including Europe. It never causes infection. Geophagism has ancient origins, and we find it practiced by many modern populations. Children of every race and all young wild animals lick clay instinctively to absorb the mineral salts required by a developing organism. The Onge habit of using clay for healing purposes can be set, therefore, in a very wide frame.

Mental and nervous disorders are rare in Little Andaman. Few natives are subject to epilepsy—an important matter for the Onge: they consider such people as possessed by spirits who speak through their mouths, and respectfully question them as oracles. Several Onge chiefs, such as Chief Tchôtâ of Tambê-ê-buiê, are apt to go into trances that have all the appearance of epileptic fits. They were elected chiefs on the strength of their epilepsy!

Constant exercise keeps eyesight and hearing extremely sharp in the Onge. I saw no single case of myopia or presbyopia among the natives, nor